

Bell Loggers prove legendary for Africa Biomass Company

The Bell 225A Crank Boom Logger is so well designed and built that even after 8 000 hours of constant use, this workhorse still delivers high availabilities and, as a bonus, is a sought-after machine in the pre-owned market.

So says Willem van der Merwe, Managing Director of WP Chipper Hire & Sales, which trades as Africa Biomass Company in Worcester in the Western Cape. Willem started his company in 2004 when he bought a tree-felling business in the town. Since then, he has grown the business to become a leader in his field.

Africa Biomass Company, as the name implies, creates wood chip and mulch and does this when fruit farmers want old trees removed. The company also removes windrows and alien vegetation where needed and

provides this service to farmers, municipalities and provincial and national government departments. Occasional demand sees the company doing riparian zone rehabilitation in rivers where alien vegetation is removed from watercourses and rivers to re-establish original conditions and flow directions.

Reducing timber to chip-sized particles and mulch indicates the use of mechanised equipment and Willem followed this course from the outset. "We've always used the Bandit Wood Chipper from the USA and in 2016 we became the company's official southern African distributor, handling sales and maintenance," Willem tells us. "The Bandit is a heavy duty and high-volume machine and we realised from the outset that if we didn't mechanise the handling of timber to feed this big production machine, we could be in trouble."



The team from Africa Biomass Company (from left): Ronel du Toit, Janneke Beukes, Andries Steenkamp, Willem van der Merwe, Mieke van Zyl and Elmarie Meyer.

To this end, Willem first bought two used Bell 225A Crank Boom Loggers and due to demand his fleet of the yellow Tri-Wheelers soon grew to eight. As his business grew, he added to the fleet of Tri-Wheelers with both used and new machines. "We typically use our Bell Loggers to uproot fruit trees, roots and all, and then move the trees with the same efficient grab to a stockpile near the wood chipper," he explains. "We would deploy two Bell 225A Loggers to a Bandit 2680 model wood chipper and as the Bell Loggers work in tandem, there is a constant feed to the machine."

"I've often been asked why we use Bell Loggers specifically and the reason is quite simple. I firmly believe in the legacy of a company and I further believe that a lot of Bell Equipment's legacy started with the Tri-Wheeler machine, which is reasonably priced, offers superb value for money and is light on fuel. It is a solid investment as, when it's eventually sold, it is still sought-after on the pre-owned market, especially when we are able to prove its maintenance with a full service history."

Willem adds that their Bell Logger fleet has subsequently grown to 24 with the last eight being bought new from Bell Equipment and financed through Bell Finance. The fleet includes a used Bell 125A Logger that is a favourite amongst his staff. When he thought of selling this machine recently, he encountered so much opposition from his operators that they decided to keep it for its nippiness around lighter applications. The oldest Bell 225A Logger now boasts some 14 000 hours of service and is still in daily use.

The Africa Biomass Company sells its products to fruit farmers and nurserymen who spread the mulch and woodchip around young trees to help maintain moisture, control weeds and create a better microclimate to encourage growth. Demand for the company's services has seen it open a branch in the Eastern Cape.

"As with any machine, we rely heavily on our suppliers for advice and technical back-up and I must commend both Fiona Johnson and Barend van der Westhuizen in the respective Bell branches in Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, for their guidance and efforts to ensure that our fleet of Bell Loggers maintain their uptime."

Willem believes in long-term relationships with both equipment suppliers and with clients. He points out that his company's success has not come about without support. "We're in a strategic association with Môreson Grondverskuiwers of Robertson and I'd like to acknowledge the mentorship role that the company's Managing Director, Johan du Preez, has had in our growth and success," he says.

Willem and his young company's success was recognised when he was named as Sanlam and Business Partners' Entrepreneur of the Year for 2017, which he acknowledges marks the dedication and commitment of everyone who works within his company and is associated with it.

